

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claims 1, 4-12 and 15-20 are pending in this application. Please cancel claims 2-3 and 13-14 without prejudice or disclaimer, and amend claims 1 and 4-12, as follows:

*being executable by a processor*

- B 1. (Currently Amended) A method implemented by a program for a question-answering apparatus having ~~[[a]]~~ communication equipment ~~for receiving an input of a question document~~, a storage for storing a plurality of reply examples and a CPU for performing a reply composition process of replying to the question document by using a reply example selected from the plurality of reply examples, the ~~program-executing method comprising the~~ steps of:

receiving an input of a question document into said communication equipment;

storing in said storage important part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an important part, and unimportant part keyword frequency information of a keyword of a reply example having an unimportant part;

dividing said input question document into a plurality of areas;

extracting a plurality of ~~important~~ areas from said input question document;

obtaining a likelihood value of a question content corresponding to each of said plurality of stored reply examples for each of said plurality of areas, by using said reply example keyword frequency information;

combining said plurality of ~~important~~ areas to provide one or a plurality of important parts in accordance with said ~~a reply example candidate~~ likelihood value of said plurality of reply examples obtained for each of said plurality of ~~important~~ areas;  
and

calculating an importance degree of each of said plurality of areas by using said important part keyword frequency information;

extracting as an important area an area having said calculated importance degree larger than a predetermined threshold value to obtain ~~obtaining~~ a reply example candidate corresponding to said important part by using the plurality of stored reply examples.

- 2-3. (Cancelled).